

# A Memorial Salute

*In Celebration of the Life, Legend and Legacy of*

**Mary Beasley Burch**

August 5, 1906 - August 12, 2001



SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2001

BURCH THEATER

ESSEX COUNTY COLLEGE

## Mary Allison Beasley Burch 1906 - 2001

Mary Burch shall forever be indelibly etched into the fabric of the City of Newark, the County of Essex, and the State of New Jersey. A citizen of the world, Mrs. Burch was known to thousands as "Ma" Burch. Mary began her New Jersey sojourn in 1946 when she settled in Newark with her physician husband, Dr. Reynold E. Burch.

As African-American middle-class professionals, the Burchs took seriously their obligation "to believe in, to inspire, motivate and liberate some of the most beautiful people on earth — young, gifted and black." Fueled by this ideology, Mary Burch is best remembered as the founder of The Leaguers, Incorporated, which was established in 1946 in Newark. This private, non-profit charitable organization has as its mission the educational, cultural and social development of African-American youth in order to prepare them to assume their rightful place in the economic and social mainstream of society. As a youth leadership development organization, The Leaguers mentor significant numbers of youth throughout the greater Essex County area, and teach them the rudiments of civic responsibility, organizational and leadership skills, career planning and preparation, and the acquisition of resources to finance post-secondary education and college entry. The organization's proverbial trademark is its annual debutante cotillion ball, which serves as a major scholarship fundraiser as well as one of the African-American community's premier social events.

Mrs. Burch was a pioneer in the pursuit of philanthropic, foundation and corporate support for The Leaguers' activities. Many of the wealthiest families in the state understood her mission and supported her work. The Leaguers became the first African-American led charitable organization in Newark to acquire land and finance the construction of a building to house program activities. Some of New Jersey's most outstanding black leaders are products of The Leaguers organization — entertainer Dionne Warwick, former U.S. Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary, U.S. Congressman Donald Payne, and many, many others. Corporate executives, elected and appointed officials, educators, doctors, lawyers, business owners, community leaders, clergy, parents — all contributors to the rich and glorious cultural life of New Jersey — benefited from the lessons and love provided to them by Mary Burch. She fervently believed that there was "Opportunity Through Education," which remains today The Leaguers' credo.

Her accomplishments are many, but it is her legacy that is most revered.

Mary Burch became the first black woman to serve as a member of the Newark Board of Education and served for 10 years as a member of the Board of Trustees of Essex County College. The Mary Burch Theater at ECC is named in her honor. She is inextricably tied to the college, having served as a member of the Davis Commission — the entity which led to the establishment of ECC. She also served as a trustee of Kean College, where a dormitory was named in her honor. She had the distinction of being the first black woman to serve on the New Jersey State Parole Board, dedicating herself to the plight of women incarcerated at the Clinton Reformatory for Women in Hunterdon County. It was during this time that she established a lifelong friendship with U.S. Congresswoman Millicent Fenwick, another icon of her era.

Mrs. Burch's organizational affiliations and memberships were innumerable. Her spirit was awe-inspiring, her wit hard to match, and her oratory skills made her a Sojourner Truth of her time. Always the elegant lady, "Ma" Burch served as the role model and standard for so many women of color — they learned to emulate her style, her class, and, most important, her commitment. A native of Lewistown, Pennsylvania who began her early career as a teacher in the segregated schools of Camden and Philadelphia, she lived the *American Black Experience*. She and her husband, as partners, designed a strategy to successfully foster leadership within the black community — and did so by coalescing with other blacks with similar interests — from all over the country, and, all over the world. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Andrew Young, and Judge Leon Higginbotham were all aware of her work and offered support.

Those who knew her never forgot her. Those who grew to love her have come to find out that their own lives were never to be the same. She gave so much; she asked for so little. She lived life as the Creator intended and can now rest upon her laurels, as we remember her with the refrain, "... Oh, Dear Lord, just let my work speak for me. . . ."

# PROGRAM

PRELUDE .....	Richard Alston Assistant Professor, Essex County College
INVOCATION .....	Rev. Vaughn Booker
WELCOME .....	Dr. A. Zachary Yamba President, Essex County College
NATIONAL ANTHEM .....	Audience
SOLO "Lift Every Voice and Sing" .....	Ramerra Wilson
SCRIPTURE "To everything there is a season..." (Ecc 3:1-12) .....	Janice Harris Jackson Kean University
SELECTION "Let There Be Peace On Earth" .....	Essex County College Choir
TRIBUTES	
SOLO .....	Todd Dowdy-Sloan Leaguer Alumnus (1980)
RESOLUTIONS	
VISUAL TRIBUTE .....	Dr. Robert Spellman Professor, Essex County College
THE LEAGUERS, INC. - YESTERDAY (ALUMNI) .....	Congressman Donald Payne The Honorable Hazel O'Leary
SOLO "I Believe" .....	Janice Carr
THE LEAGUERS, INC. - TODAY .....	Veronica E. Ray Executive Director
THE LEAGUERS, INC. - "The Message" .....	Kelly Wilson Youth Coordinator, Author of "The Message"
THE FAMILY .....	Rev. Vaughn Booker Delores Rich Ollie Patricia Bekele
EXCERPTS OF HER LIFE .....	Eric Williams, Jr.
REFLECTIONS .....	Yvonne C. Lowen Board Chairperson, The Leaguers, Inc.
SELECTION "Now is the Hour" (A Waltz) .....	The Leaguers, Inc.
CLOSING PRAYER .....	Dr. Robert Spellman

*Family and friends are invited to fellowship in the Main Dining Hall*

*Williamson  
John Leary  
April*

## Monuments to Memories

This play is one (lifetime) act,  
a story of recursive definition.  
The cast enacts the births and  
deaths and reasons, with overstudied  
playing suns and seasons.

The Director breathes and  
brings the house to half.  
The lights go down and glories  
from their paths take center stage.

And cleverly as Birnam Woods  
to Dunstane, the play recycled  
turns to life again.

This graven playbill in your hand  
will mark a pause.  
It is to Life as Calendars to Time.  
These monuments to the memories,  
faded accolades for Love and Strife,  
a fitting prologue to the drama  
of Eternal Life.

DEDICATION OF THE MARY B. BURCH HALL  
KEAN COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY  
MAY 4, 1977  
ON THE RESIDENCE HALL GREEN

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"Dr. and Mrs. Burch became my godparents at an early age. Dear to me,  
yet, my heart, though deeply saddened, rejoices in knowing that  
they are now together and at peace. They always knew my love and gratitude."

Today adds a new stanza to Monument to Memories. Your encouraging presence, your outpouring  
expressions of love and respect, your celebration of a triumphant spirit make you a warm and welcome  
part of the continuum. The family thanks you wholeheartedly. Family members include:

NEPTUNE, NJ  
Patia Aikens

EAST ORANGE, NJ  
Delores Rich Ollie

UNION, NJ  
Sheila Beasley Reid

PHILADELPHIA, PA  
Mable Sarah Ballard  
Lynn (husband Rev. Joseph) Dugan  
April Lacey  
Gus Lacey, Jr.  
Virginia Lacey  
Gladys Reynolds Reavis  
Taffy Reynolds  
Gloria Taliaferro

CINCINNATI, OH  
Charles (wife Kathryn) Miller  
Michael (wife Gayle) Miller  
Nellie Archer Miller  
Camela Miller Buford

RICHMOND, VA  
Martha Smith Barclay

ALEXANDRIA, VA  
Rev. Vaughn Booker

FREDERICKSBURG, VA  
Blanche Rich Jefferson

MILFORD, VA  
John Rich

Connie Thompson, devoted caregiver to Dr. and Mrs. Burch

Zach - fight to keep  
college in N.  
She believed in  
the college.

Donald -  
the great gift of  
having our lives  
interconnected  
with Dr. B.

not the material  
things we want  
people who said  
we were chosen  
touched our lives

may not be stricken  
here as many  
complain, if not  
for her presence

Baccho not  
near great  
port  
David Thomas

Michael not  
seen  
Ray, Simon  
out  
artist that  
Mr. Burch  
Dr. M.B.  
in 1965

we have validated each other  
off to build relationships - hope  
love each other if core  
take great pride in the family